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ABSTRACT

The accreditation self-study provides an institution with the opportunity to identify and understand its strengths and weaknesses and use this understanding in developing plans for future institutional change. Four elements contribute to an effective planning or change process: (1) careful assessment of the environment to identify, forecast and assess the implications of external conditions which are of strategic importance to the institution; (2) internal resource auditing and program evaluation to determine how well prepared the institution is to pursue particular strategic directions; (3) institutional master planning based on a review of the institution's history, philosophy, operations, and external environment; and (4) priority setting and resource allocation. Since 1982, Cuyahoga Community College (CCC) in Ohio has employed a strategic planning model incorporating these elements. The process resulted in the development of an action-oriented and programmatic "Blueprint for Excellence in the Third Decade," which serves as the framework for decisions involving educational resources and programs. Review and evaluation of academic programs have also received increased emphasis at the college since the implementation of the planning model, with program evaluation focusing primarily on current and future market conditions and needs. The self-study assists institutional planning in that it requires confirmation of an institution's mission statement, provides essential planning data, enhances attitudinal commitment and the predisposition to analysis, and demands strong executive leadership. (EJV)

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STRATEGIC USE OF ACCREDITATION FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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STRATEGIC USE OF ACCREDITATION FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Nolen M. Ellison and Janet D. Smith

INTRODUCTION

Accreditation: It's Function and Value

Accreditation is granted to an educational institution or program that has been found to meet or exceed stated criteria for educational quality. It has two fundamental purposes: to assure quality and to assist in improvement. This article will outline yet a third valuable benefit that can accrue from the accreditation process. This benefit can prove to be a significant bonus to colleges and universities as they move ahead in these rapidly changing times.

The criteria for accreditation are broad. Accreditation certifies that:

- The institution has clearly established its mission and purposes.
- It has the resources to accomplish these goals.
- It will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

It also encourages new efforts in the direction of innovative curricula and procedures. The process requires, among other items, a detailed institutional self-study.

While Accreditation is an official stamp of academic approval, it provides the institution an opportunity to identify and understand its strengths and weaknesses. Improvement is encouraged by an accrediting body through the requirement that the institution conduct periodic self-evaluations to identify what it does well, to determine where improvement is needed, and to develop plans to address those improvements. Institutional improvement is also encouraged through the advice and counsel provided by the visiting team and by the publications of the accrediting body. This encouragement to improve

through self-study is important to a discussion focusing on institutional change.

Criterion Four: A Hard Look at the Future

The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) is the regional body governing accreditation of most colleges and universities in the midwest. By its criteria, an accredited institution must meet four general institutional requirements and fulfill four evaluative criteria which reflect its purpose, organization of resources, accomplishment of purpose and its ability to continue to accomplish its purpose. This fourth criterion is important as we discuss the use of accreditation for institutional change. Criterion four requires that the visiting team determine whether or not the institution can continue to accomplish its proper job. Since the NCA is certifying accreditation for the future, criterion four may well be the most important requirement for accreditation.

The self-study process can be an aid in developing plans for the future. The bottom line for institutions should be the self-study and how effectively it becomes a part of the planning process.

Opportunity for Change - A Basic Premise in the Planning Process

It is important to note that a wide range of decisions surface as planning proceeds. It must be decided who will participate, who will be responsible for what areas and at what level planning will take place. It is very important that the planning process focus on change and that change be equated with improvement. Planning forces us to organize our expectations and develop a program to accomplish these expectations. Planning enhances an institution's capacity to adapt to changing conditions and, thus, to more appropriately accomplish its mission.

The opportunity for change is inherent in the planning process. It is, by definition, also inherent in the conduct of a self-study to meet the accreditation requirements outlined in NCA's criterion four -- that an institution give reason to believe that it will continue to accomplish its purpose.

Conditions for Assuring Institutional Change

Effective planning emphasizes rationality, utilizes information, and controls or influences future events. What are the important elements which contribute to an effective planning or change process?

The first two conditions concern adjustments to the way decisions are reached for resource allocation, program modifications or new program development which requires a careful assessment of the environment and the development of an institutional "blueprint" or master plan. The second two elements deal with tactical planning. They include management efforts to assure the achievement of institutional goals and efforts to preserve and improve the vitality and quality of organizational units. These four elements constitute an effective process. Strategic planning and institutional self-study should be considered integrated processes and not separate entities.

Environmental Assessment for Strategic Planning

Colleges and universities often become larger, more complex, and self-perpetuating. They tend to let inside demands engage the energies of policy makers to the near exclusion of adapting to serve a changing environment. While change can be difficult, it also creates opportunities, and involves some risks. Advance notice, even a glimpse of it, is therefore essential to intelligent planning. This is how we make certain that the institution is indeed capable of accomplishing its purposes in the future as required by criterion four.

Planning that allows us to do this systematically is called "strategic" planning. Strategic planning is distinguished principally from long-range planning by its focus on the interaction of an institution with its ever-changing environment. Planning tends to make the best use of the trends of today in building for tomorrow. Strategic planning is concerned with important changes in organizational direction rather than with doing today's operations more efficiently. Strategic planning is that element of a manager's job that deals with the contrivance of change, rather than the simple reaction to it.

Long-range planning, as it is traditionally practiced in higher education, is too static to meet rapidly emerging challenges. This more traditional approach to planning, in a context of continuous, sometimes dramatic growth in both students and resources, has been oriented toward understanding and gaining control of growth. It has tended to describe and catalogue current activities and project them into the future along seemingly predictable trend lines. It does not prepare an institution to cope successfully with a future characterized by rapid, hard to predict change, by declining student enrollments, and by mitigating fiscal and other pressures against growth. Thus, higher education institutions are increasingly turning to the more dynamic process of strategic planning.

There are four basic steps in the strategic planning process. The first step is environmental analysis. This step identifies, forecasts and assesses the implications of external conditions which are of strategic importance to the institution. The second step is the internal resource audit. This step assesses the important strengths and weaknesses of the organization. The third step involves formulation of strategic objectives or change targets along with detailed plans for carrying them out. The fourth step is the implementation of such plans.

Environmental analysis represents the most challenging step. What factors are most pertinent to the institution's future? How significant is each? While analytical tools are available for forecasting, a large measure of human intuition and judgement is inevitable in reaching a conclusion. There is a dangerous tendency to gloss over this step. Many managers believe that they already know what they need to know about the environment. However, a set of strategic objectives based on such a perfunctory look at the environment would constitute a risky game plan for an institution to follow!

To be of maximum use, the environmental scan should also identify two important areas. The first is significant opportunities for new or enhanced "business". The second is environmental constraints or barriers to moving in a particular direction. What is identified as an opportunity or a constraint will depend on the relative strengths and weaknesses of the institution. Therefore, an internal resource audit becomes the second major phase of the strategic planning process. A systematic means of instructional program

review is an important component of this phase.

Internal Resource Auditing and Program Evaluation

The value of the internal resource audit is to determine how well prepared the institution is to pursue particular strategic directions. It is one means of evaluating "targets of opportunity." Whether to turn an environmental condition into a strategic objective will depend largely on the institution's resources needed for a particular course of action. The institution may be able to pursue another equally challenging direction at less cost because it already has the necessary resources.

The Internal Resource Audit is concerned with operational, financial and managerial dimensions of the institution. If solid dependability and operational efficiency have been rewarded by, and characterized by top management, then it might be risky to pursue a target of opportunity which requires flexibility and an innovative entrepreneurial approach. How solid is the technical infrastructure? Are the institution's financial management, budget, computer and personnel management system and processes modern and capable of supporting major new initiatives? Are there significant weaknesses in the institution which will make the strain of too much change overwhelming?

Another significant component relates to what, how and how successfully the institution develops, maintains, and delivers its programs and services. What human resources, techniques, technologies and facilities are used for this purpose? It is here that a process for systematic program review and continuous evaluation becomes an important part of the institutional self-study, hence the place for planning for the future and for change. Self-studies for career program accreditation can also use environmental scanning and internal resource auditing processes to initiate specific program change. In this way, internal resource auditing and program review, like environmental scanning are used as learning tools to identify and collect information about what external factors exist and what institutional capacities exist or are needed to accomplish appropriate ends.

When employed as integral parts of strategic planning, environmental scanning and internal resource auditing processes offer many benefits. They help in

identifying crucial issues in goal formulation. They also increase appreciation among operating units for ways in which other units interact with each other and with their shared environment. A third benefit is that the two processes increase the receptiveness of administrators, faculty, and staff to new opportunities, and also helps to improve communication, focus, and synergy related to institutional change.

Strategic Master Plans

A third condition for assuring institutional change is institutional master planning. The scope of master planning focuses on the entire institution. The process used to develop a master plan typically reviews the institution's history and philosophy and describes data pertaining to its operation. Such data includes enrollments, staffing level, salaries and costs. The process also describes the external environment. This latter description focuses on manpower and demographics as well as other trends and recommends institutional changes along with a schedule for their implementation.

Typical master plan recommendations range from a call for modified institutional role to a call for higher-quality programs. It is partly the nature of the recommendations, rather than the concept or process of master planning that typically invites cynicism. The changes expected from master planning are not always clearly measurable. Implementation plans are often vague and do not materialize as scheduled and the sheer volume of activity that is required to develop a master plan often makes it an unweildy process.

Often viewed as a grand design for all to follow, a master plan can be seen as an explanation of the institution's educational and operating philosophy, an analysis of its current condition and a description of major changes that it will seek to implement during its intermediate to long-range future. Strategic planning is viewed as a process which focuses on change. It is a special kind of master planning which requires institutional self-study, rather than mere self description.

The substance and process of master planning are changing as a result of new conditions facing colleges and universities. No longer are institutions likely to be focusing on enrollment growth. Rather, their focus is more

likely to be on qualitative improvement in a steady state of enrollment or even the management of enrollment decline. It is under these circumstances that priority setting and resource allocation are important to planning. It is here that administrative, faculty and staff participation and communication become important.

Priority Setting and Resource Allocation

A significant but often overlooked step in planning is that which establishes the relative importance of various institutional goals or actions to be taken during the next budget period. Strategic goals and plans provide the basis for short as well as longer term priorities for the institution. The institutional values and the nature of its resources are part of what is synthesized and integrated in order to determine the strategic priorities. Individual college units can in turn develop priorities which are supportive of the strategies and plans of its division. Allocation of resources to institutional priorities derived from careful assessment of the external environment and institutional capabilities would reflect that the college has not only developed plans, but has allocated its resources in a manner which will enable it to continue to accomplish its purpose. This ability to support plans for the future is consistent with the requirements called for in criterion four of the institutional accreditation process.

Note the potential for conflict in setting priorities. Both strategic and master planning must result in definitive, operationally meaningful institutional objectives which can be prioritized in a meaningful way for a given fiscal year. But rationality through prioritization only tempers the politics of resource allocation. An institutional evaluation system, as part of an ongoing self-study process, would be one means of reducing ways to get around the socio-phychological incentives for thwarting the resource allocation process. Such an evaluation system would consider that unit objectives are tied to institutional priorities and that unit outcomes should aggregate to outcomes expected for institutional priorities. The clarity of institutional objectives and their prioritization enables the decision making process related to resource allocation to be more rational.

A brief look at three processes underway at Cuyahoga Community College will

help to illustrate some of these principles and offer some guidelines for linking self-study and planning.

STRATEGIC PLANNING, MASTER PLANNING AND PROGRAM REVIEW AT CUYAHOGA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Cuyahoga Community College is located in a large urban center. It serves the community from three locations and some 40 off-campus sites. The College opened in 1963 and experienced a period of rapid growth during the first 13 years, but like many other urban colleges, has shown varying levels of enrollment decline since 1976. Cuyahoga Community College offers 53 career/technical programs, eight degrees and certificate programs and a strong pre-baccalaureate program. Approximately 21.3% of its operational budget comes from a student tuition at $21 per credit.

Strategic Planning Model

An in-depth study of long-range planning at Cuyahoga Community College from 1975 through 1980 concluded that the process did not make a significant contribution to strategic decision-making or educational innovation. Oriented toward management and control of growth, long-range planning had tended to generate lengthy descriptions of existing activity and future possibilities. Little connection could be made between long-range planning and the annual resource allocation process. The primary contribution of long-range planning has been to build a commitment to a multi-campus institution with one set of goals.

By 1981, the environment had changed dramatically. The need for educational creativity and innovation was acute. Improvements in long- and short-range planning were aimed at ensuring that innovation, change and growth occurred as part of the formal planning process. Educational priorities and plans were developed to "drive" other institutional plans and resource allocation decisions.

Each year since 1982, the external environment has been studied along with the internal resources of the College. The values of the institution, in its

current context and those major challenges which face it are carefully analyzed. Issues and opportunities are identified and strategic goals developed. Although planning is an executive responsibility staffed by the planning office, there are multiple levels of management within the organization who participate in the strategic planning process.

During the first three years, at least four benefits were derived from the strategic educational planning process. The process ensured that strategic decisions regarding educational programming were made in an effective and timely fashion. It promoted systematic educational innovation and institutional growth. It focused on the strategic leadership and decision-making role of the President and the Board of Trustees. The strategic educational planning process also built on former planning and management system development work. The result was improved and expanded training opportunities for area citizens.

After the first three years a careful review of the process revealed that certain enhancements would add even greater value. The strategic planning process was not adequately coordinated with biennial and other long-range planning activities including annual operational planning, or the resource allocation process. The process had focused on new ventures related only to academic programming. It had not adequately addressed planning for the implementation required to accomplish strategic goals.

Enhancements to Cuyahoga Community College's strategic planning process for the fiscal year 1986 resulted in a process that today serves as the primary planning activity of the annual resource allocation process. The process ensures Cabinet leadership and responsibility in the formulation of strategic goals. Detailed operational plans for strategic goal implementation have been developed and strategic planning has been expanded to academic as well as the non-academic areas of the College. As a result of these activities there is now an opportunity for the development of strategic thinking capability at all levels of operation within the College.

Organizationally, this planning process has been implemented through the technical planning staff. This staff consists of the Vice President for Educational Planning, the Assistant Vice President for Institutional Planning

and Research and District Directors for Student Development, Curriculum Management, Academic Fiscal and Policy Affairs, and Academic Support. The Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, backed by the technical planning staff, provides primary support to the College President and the Board in strategic planning. Substantive review and recommendations are provided by the President's Cabinet, which has been expanded to include Instructional and Student Development Deans. The expanded Cabinet serves as the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee. The Strategic Goal Implementation Task Force(s) which reflect leadership responsibilities for goal implementation assure detailed planning for the latter. The strategic planning process is focused and intense. It occurs over a three month period which begins in October and ends in January of each year.

At the beginning of the process the President issues the Executive Resource Allocation and Budget Guidelines. The Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs issues the Institutional Plan for Advancement. The Senior Vice President for Human Resources and Administrative Affairs/Treasurer issues the Budget Preparation Procedures Manual. The annual budget process clearly incorporates planning goals for the college and designates the unit responsible for their implementation.

A Blueprint for Excellence in the Third Decade

During the first two decades of operation Cuyahoga Community College focused its energies on developing programs that linked its mission to the demographic and economic patterns of the region. By the late 1970s and early 1980s the emphasis had shifted to educational effectiveness, lifelong learning, instructional technology, economic redevelopment, cultural arts and academic excellence. With the installation of sound management and human resource systems to support these priorities, the College grew to preeminence among two-year institutions. The primary planning document was still its Official College Plan, but strategic planning had provided a clear sense of direction for institutional change.

As it moved into the third decade, it was evident that the College's success would be measured by its ability to continue providing high quality services. Its success would also be measured by its adaptability and effectiveness in

responding to the demands for excellence and career-relevant training for business and industries in the local area. Two major challenges were related to the demand for educational reform. These were highlighted in numerous national and local reports on education, and by the demand to assist Ohio Businesses and industries with economic growth well into the twenty-first century.

The College's response to these two imperatives to participate in and support educational and economic development required an institutional commitment to new standards of excellence. Cuyahoga Community College's "Blueprint for Excellence" in the Third Decade had to be action-oriented and programmatic. The purpose of the Blueprint was to identify the highest priorities and most workable areas for innovation and the development of short- and long-range approaches for improvement in teaching and learning. The Blueprint had to serve as a framework for decisions involving educational programs and resources in the immediate years ahead. It identified and emphasized a minimum number of institutional priorities with strategic targets and projects under each. Detailed implementation plans for each process defined clearly the strategy for change involved between 1983 and 1993. Blueprint planning involved technical planning staff as well as key line managers, program coordinators, and faculty who would implement action plans in priority areas.

The details of this specialized long-range planning activity evolved as decisions were made in such policy arenas as the President's Cabinet, a special Collegewide Committee, and other planning and management structures. The working document which introduced the college family to the concept of, and need for a Blueprint for Excellence was a brief, straightforward one. It outlined a conceptual framework, proposed five institutional priorities, identified the institutional requirements neccessary to implement an educational reform agenda, described planning standards and offered a schedule for the planning process. A faculty input and review process was also developed.

The "heart" of the Blueprint planning process consisted of hearings at each of the College's three campuses. Administrator and faculty participants were selected by the Campus Provosts/Vice Presidents. Each was given a copy of the working document and the discussion questions in order to focus their

thinking. The "listening team" of administrators were instructed to listen carefully and to keep in mind the themes that ran throughout the working document. The themes stressed: building on the College's existing base; high priorities for advancement in the third decade; human resource development; a focus on teaching and learning; continued improvements in the College's planning, management and evaluation system; and cultivation of leadership and excellence at all levels.

The hearings were scheduled for ninety minute discussion sessions and focused on three essential questions which included the meaning of the Blueprint to each campus in the College District; the priorities which make sense for immediate action; and the key requirements for success in achieving the priorities. Team members were to pay particular attention to the most important priorities for immediate action in the College and at each campus. They were also expected to understand the nature of resources needed to implement priorities, the perceived effect of priorities on existing jobs; and measures of evaluating the achievement of each priority.

Cuyahoga Community College's first Blueprint for Excellence: Five Priorities for the Third Decade was completed in July, 1984. A second Blueprint is now being developed. Blueprint I contained a summary of key projects to be implemented beginning in fiscal year 1985. Blueprint I still has substantial impact on educational resource allocation decisions. The Blueprint planning process was an executive initiative. It was a highly participatory, but also highly structued process. The projects linked with each major priority were largely proposed by "idea champions" from throughout the College. Project selection depended on careful review of detailed proposals. Each project was funded from internal or external sources. Each has required strong project management. Effective intra- and inter-institutional linkages have also been required for their implementation.

Cuyahoga Community College's Strategic Planning and Blueprint development processes have enabled it to become even stronger in stimulating local economic growth. Important outcomes of these planning processes have included building a student body that is better prepared for a four year college, that learns more as it matriculates, and that is more able when it graduates. Local residents and organizations have become more technologically competent

in an ever-changing computer and communications information society. Effective models for service delivery have been implemented in order to carry out the community college mission. The skills of, and opportunities for improving the capabilities of the College's faculty, staff and administrators have likewise improved in the process.

An Exploratory Program Review and Evaluation Model

Review and evaluation of academic programs at Cuyahoga Community College has also received increased emphasis. The primary purpose of the review and evaluation process is to improve the quality of educational services to students. The goal is to assure continuing program relevance and to improve the efficiency of their operations.

At the program review level, the general health of academic programs is defined by their trends in attraction, retention, placement, cost comparison (with State model), and cost. Current market conditions and short-term market projections are also identified. As the results of such annual program review, a more refined process of program evaluation is integrated into the program based self-study and planning process. Attention is also given to those key variables necessary for management decisions making.

The plan for program evaluation focuses primarily on current and future market conditions and needs. The latter serves to define needed curriculum changes. Attention is also given to outreach and student recruitment activities, program quality, image, administration, qualification of applicants and characteristics of students. The evaluation is a joint undertaking with program administrators, staff, faculty and the College's evaluation specialists. Other participants in this "open" process may include program Advisory Committee members and current as well as former students. The program evaluation process is an effort to improve the program by a better understanding of its students, its challenges, its resources, its outcomes, its opportunities, and its plans for the future. The evaluation process involves those persons in the program who are most closely associated with improving the quality of its student output.

As is the case with any such effort, the program review indicators, formulae

for calculating each, and method of formal evaluation will continue to need refinement. The participatory evaluation process is an important means of bringing about needed program changes. The systematic approach to program evaluation greatly enhances the College's ability to integrate accreditation recommendations and observations; employer, graduate and student feedback, and Advisory Committee input in program planning and management. Appropriate resource allocation can thus assure that the program continues to meet the needs of the local area.

TYING INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING TO SELF-STUDY

These three examples of planning for change at Cuyahoga Community College illustrate how planning initiatives can be enhanced by the self-study process if the two are linked together. The evolution of Cuyahoga Community College's strategic planning process, the institutionalization of a system for program review and evaluation, and the identification of a set of institutional priorities within which to develop a Blueprint for Excellence have increased the College's ability to examine itself and plan for the future. They have also identified a number of significant prerequisites for planning for institutional change. Many of these prerequisites are similar to those which assured the success of the College's self-studies for the North Central Accreditation in 1979 and NCA's focused visit five years later. A few of the benefits as well as the prerequisites of both planning and self-study can serve as working guidelines for tying institutional planning for change to the self-study process that is required and subsequently encouraged by accreditation.

Confirmation of Institutions Mission Statement

The statement of institutional mission is critical to any planning process and to the self-study. A fundamental requirement for accreditation is the formal adoption of a statement of mission appropriate to the institution. The mission statement is the basis for assessing the success of the institution and its programs. In like manner, the planning process may involve the confirmation or redefinition of a mission statement. This statement should address the general direction of the institution. The mission statement

should also address the goals and objectives for future institutional development. The latter is influenced by external and internal supply and demand factors.

Data Requirements

The planning process can also play a crucial role in the institutional self-study since obtaining and using empirical evidence are essential to both processes. Extensive data collection and analysis are required for accreditation. The internal resource audit requires a close look at all aspects of institutional operation including financial, human resources, programs, and administrative inputs and outputs. To conceptualize plans and implement them requires timely, accurate information on which to make assessments. Data which indicates the health of the organization is required for ongoing planning decisions in order to bring about institutional change. That same data is used as evidence to the accrediting agency that the institution has effectively organized adequate human, financial and physical resources to accomplish its purpose, that it is accomplishing and can continue to accomplish its purpose. Institutional planning and institutional self-study can be tied together with a minimum of effort . The basic institutional data form required for accreditation can, for example, be synchronized with the way in which institutional data is collected and formatted for planning purposes.

Attitudinal Commitment and Pre-disposition to Analysis

The planning process, like the accrediation self-study, requires critical self-examination. While in many ways evaluation occurs constantly, formal program review and evaluation imply a multi-stage process that promotes disciplined reflection on courses and curriculum activities. Some significant questions which guide the selection of strategic targets at Cuyahoga Community College are: Is it our business? Can we do it? Should we do it? How will it change the manner in which functions are carried out or services provided? What impact will this activity have on the total institution? This shift in attitude and the pre-disposition to be evaluative rather than descriptive provides an opportunity to determine which goals are selected and establish priorities. This orientation to welcome, rather than resist change is

indicative of the same kind of orientation and commitment that is required to use the self-study as an institutional aid in developing plans for improvement as encouraged by the accrediting body. It is this kind of orientation that welcomes the sometimes critical comments of the visiting NCA team. An effective planning process has, as one of its benefits, the development of such an attitude among executives, as well as at all levels of operation throughout the institution.

Executive Leadership and Responsibility

Excessive paperwork is often criticized as inherent in planning, particularly in long-range planning. The reality, or even the perception thereof, is counter-productive to the value of planning. Often overlooked is that the size and composition of both the planning group and the self-study group influence the effectiveness of the processes and their results. Strategic and long-range plans will be the result of compromise, integration and debate. Broad-based input is required for successful implementation of plans. Planning for change and the establishment of institutional priorities is, however, the responsibility of executive leadership. The planning group serves as staff to these executive decisions. The commitment of executive leadership to decision making based on institutional analysis and self-study are quite similar. Cabinet level responsibility for planning recommendations and for the confirmation of processes for, as well as conduct of the self-study are also important.

The requirement for accreditation and the four evaluative criteria can be helpful in shaping the paramaters of institutional planning, thus using the self-study as a springboard. Such planning paramaters can, however, only be confirmed at the executive level. Similarly, executive leadership is in the best position to utilize an important benefit of the accreditation self-study process which is often overlooked -- that of program improvement. In order to plan for change, goals and objectives must be prioritized. These priorities provide direction and context for unit goals and are directly related to resource allocation decisions which are made at the executive level.

CONCLUSION

The final evaluative criterion as to whether the institution can continue to accomplish its purpose, requires a degree of informed speculation just as the process of accreditation requires such judgement by the NCA visiting team. One approach is to speculate that if the institution has been successful in the past, its chances of continuing to be successful in the future are also good. But the future will almost certainly not be the same as the past or present. It is incumbent upon the institution to demonstrate its ability to cope with such uncertainty. This demonstration is most closely tied to the evidence of an institutionalized process of planning, a capacity for change, and evidence of the effectiveness of the process in bringing about change.

Strategic planning must be evidenced within the self-study. It must be linked to the efficient utilization of human and material resources during periods of economic growth. Strategic planning is absolutely imperative for institutional survival during times of economic crisis. It requires careful, thorough and ongoing analysis of empirical evidence in order to restructure goals and procedures associated with increased excellence in instruction, scholarship, and professional service.

The self-study process is not only required to demonstrate that the institution meets both the general institutional requirements and the evaluative criteria for accreditation. It also provides a framework for the confirmation of a mission statement. The self-study calls for commitment, responsibility, predisposition to analysis and the reliance on evidence to assure that the institution does, indeed, possess the capacity to continue to accomplish its stated mission. The encouragement provided by the accrediting agency to plan for institutional improvement through the self-study is one that offers an ideal opportunity to every institution of higher education that has accepted the challenge of keeping pace with a dynamic, elusive and turbulent environment. This environment presents a new kind of student clientele, new relationships and accountabilities with businesses, public service, governmental and funding agencies, young people and the public. It offers new relationships and new responsibilities to the instructional faculty. The changing environment also calls for new approaches to the economic survival of most higher education institutions. These new approaches

will also require focused planning and on-going self-study.

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